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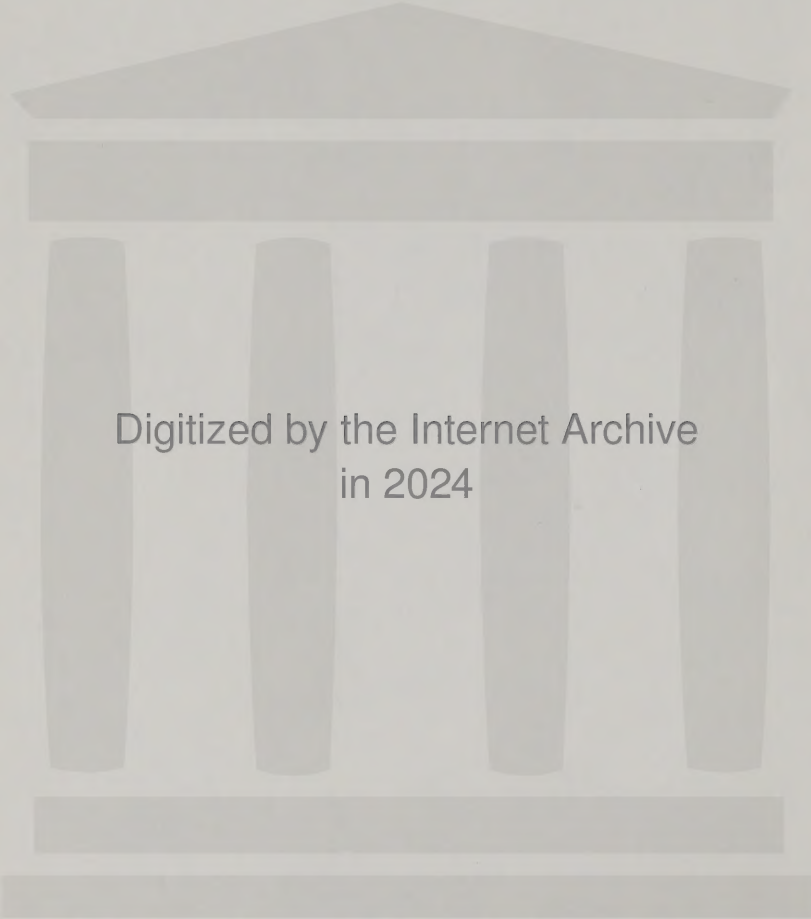
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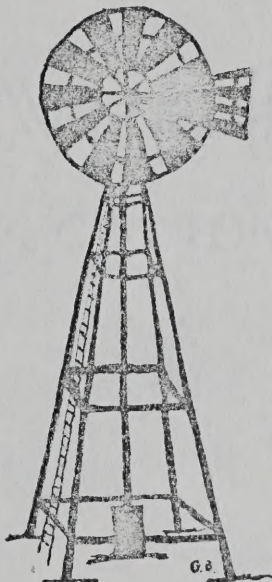


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So This Is Langtry

Dep.



By
Grace Barnes -- Beth Gault

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DEDICATION

TO THE THOUSAND OF FURRINERS
WHO COME THROUGH LANGTRY
WANTING NEWS ABOUT THE
"OLD JEDGE"

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ACKNOWLEDGMENTS

WE WISH TO EXPRESS OUR APPRECIATION
TO THE LANGTRITES WHO HAVE BEEN SO
GENEROUS WITH TRUE INFORMATION, TALL
TALES, AND OTHER LANGTRYANA.

“SO THIS IS LANGTRY”

Hello, Mr. Tourist! Yes, this is Langtry.

Langtry, today the sleepy little town on the Rio Grande,—has not always been so. The people? Oh, they’ve mostly moved east of the Pecos since the Old Judge is not here any more to keep peace. Yeah, he died in 1903 after he’d been on a big’un. He was buried in the Del Rio Cemetery.

“Where did Langtry get it’s name?” You ask.

Well, we do not rightly know, there being two popular tales about that:

One says that when the right-of-way for the Southern Pacific railroad was surveyed through here around 1880 the surveyor was named Langtry; and since nearly all signals, switches and stations are named for officials of the company, this station was named for Langtry. But that doesn’t make such good reading as this one:

Some fellow accidentally left a copy of the London

Illustrated News in Bean's place. Bean picked it up and as he looked through it he saw a picture of a beautiful woman. This was the English actress, "Lily Langtry," who was quite popular on Broadway at that time. How he fell for her! He raved about her and pasted up every picture of her he could lay hands on, decorating the walls of the saloon. Finally, he wrote her a letter that he was changing the name of the town from Eagle Nest to Langtry, that he was naming his saloon the Jersey Lily—she being from the Isle of Jersey;—and that he wished she could be here for the ceremony. She couldn't come then, but was through here later, after he died. She stood on the observation platform, watched a program presented by the school children, and shook hands with everyone—several of those people who were school children then live here and still remember the event. Before she left, she gave one hundred dollars for the school. This money was used to enlarge the school building.

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"So you want to know where Bean was from?" Well, there are also two tales about that one: Old timers here seem to like, and tell this one:

Bean was on a gallows in Mexico with the noose properly adjusted when a good-looking senorita rescued him and loaded him in a wagon under a bunch of hides, and took off in high-gear for parts "North of the Border, and West of the Pecos," out of the clutches of the law. We do know Bean had a stiff neck which he tried to cover by wearing a bandana the rest of his life. But whether this tale is true,—we know not.

Another tale says he had a dairy in San Antonio where he almost got rich selling creek water until someone who discovered a minnow in his bucket of milk had the temerity to notify the officials. Bean explained the minnow, by saying, that his cow must have drunk it while watering herself at the creek. But he quickly loaded his wagon full of spirits and drove west at a goodly speed.

We first hear of Bean at the site of an old government camp which was located near the rock pens this side of the Pecos river. This being in the Indian days. This camp was called Vinegarroon because that is the Spanish name for the scorpion-like insect which infested the place. They say Bean lived and sold his spirits in a rock lean-to on which he used his wagon-sheet for a roof—this being before anyone knew what a tarpaulin was. Now, Abe Lincoln built such a shack of poles because they were easily obtained, but to Roy Bean, rock was the material at hand, so rock he used. He didn't take the time and trouble to cement the rocks as he stacked them, or to put on a good roof, for he was afraid that he'd miss selling a bottle of beer, or, that he wouldn't be ready to move-on as quickly as the railroad moved it's camp. He never needed a door, for there wasn't a curfew or a blue law in Vinegarroon. This camp was about his longest stop before he reached Langtry. The remains of such camps can still be seen. He sold "spirits"

bitters, beer and sodawater from round ended bottles. Once a man growled about his beer being hot and demanded ice. Bean laughed at him and said, "By gob (his favorite by-word) whoever heard of ice in the summertime?"

While Bean was still at Vinegarroon he was elected Justice of the Peace in Val Verde county, which by the way, had just been organized in 1884 out of Kinney, Crockett and Pecos counties. The commissioners court approved his bond in August 1885. By this approval we see that although Texans are said to obey no law,—not even the law of gravity—they did recognize the need of some sort of law even in those early days.

Much of the land in this region was originally granted to the Torres manufacturing and Irrigation Company. An heir of the grantee was J. P. Torres, but he was no friend of Roy Bean. In 1886 he made a contract with the railroad company by which he gave



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Warren Studio, Del Rio, Texas

the company half interest in the town-site to persuade them to build a station there. In this contract, it is said, the railroad company was neither to rent, lease nor sell any land to Roy Bean. Therefore, when Bean moved to Langtry he first "squatted" on the railroad right-of-way. Then he put up a hundred dollars for a friend to buy a lot across the street from the depot for him. On this land he built a saloon and bar of justice, while J. P. Torres raved and ranted.

The adobe building toward the river from the Jersey Lily is reputed to be the oldest building in Langtry. It was built by J. P. Torres and the front room of the building was used by him for a store.

Why Bean and Torres feuded is not definitely known, but we suppose it was because they both wanted to be the big frog in the little puddle. We do know that when Torres ran against Bean for the office of Justice of the Peace, animosity ran high and the Texas Rangers had to be called in to keep "The Law"

in order.

When Bean thought that Lily Langtry might pay him a visit, he set to work and built the adobe house across the street to the left of the saloon, and called it the Opera House. He built it in hopes Lily would put on a play in it; but when it became evident that Lily wasn't coming he used it to house his family, for the size of his family had by this time out-grown the size of the adobe shack.

The Jersey Lily was located across the street from the depot, a very handy spot for any thirsty traveler riding the train. Bean profited greatly by the fact that most trains merely paused in Langtry, for in the excitement of getting drinks for all the customers, Bean frequently forgot to give them their change. Quite often, too, he fumbled-around making change until suddenly the customer realized that the train was leaving him, so off he'd rush minus the change from a five or ten.—Little paper money was used in those

days and silver dollars were much heavier than a twenty dollar gold piece.

A drummer—salesman to you—from San Antonio, who was thus short-changed in the Jersey Lily, decided to get even with Bean.

Now Bean had a pet bear, Sarsaparilla, of which he was fond, due to the fact that the bear could out-drink any one he'd ever been matched against, and Bean had won considerable money betting on him.

Once when Bean was on a binge in San Antonio he met the drummer who had just arrived from points west. Since he had passed through Langtry he knew that Sarsaparilla was hale and hearty, but he said, "I'm sorry to hear Sarsaparilla is dead, you'll surely miss the brute. I was fond of the critter myself. Why don't you let me have the hide to hang in my den?" Well, Bean liked the drummer and saw no reason for not letting him have the hide, so he wired his son, Sam, to skin Sarsaparilla and ship him the hide. Now,

Sam had been well trained and though he thought his dad had lost his mind, he complied with his order. Imagine how Bean frothed when he got home and learned the trick that had been played on him.

While they were still building the railroad, a dead Chinaman was found and brought in to Bean for an inquest. Bean examined the Chinaman and found that he had a gun and fifty dollars on him. Ruffling quickly through the pages of his law book, Justice Bean found that though it was against the law to kill a man, nothing was said about a Chinaman. Never missing a chance to appropriate a dime, he fined the dead Chinaman the fifty dollars for wearing a gun.

A puncher drifted into Langtry one day on a horse whose ownership had recently changed hands without the permission of the owner, who, by the way, demanded immediate arrest of the cowboy. Bean, who dearly loved a trial, quickly took off his floursack apron, got down his law book, and called the court

to order. The charge against the cowboy was a capital offense and one for which men were ordinarily strung up without benefit of a trial. Bean heard the testimony for thirty minutes and then recessed for "refreshments". During this time the prisoner was in a quandary as to how he was going to get out of this hot spot. Then as he spied a picture of Lily Langtry, he remarked, "That shore is a mighty fine picture of Miss Langtry, but it shore ain't as purty as she really is." Bean's face fairly beamed.

"Do you mean to tell me, hombre, that you shore 'nough saw her?"

"Yeah, I saw her at the Orpheum in Chicago when I went up the trail with some cattle. The purtiest woman in the world."

The prisoner saw the effect his words were having, so he really "poured it on" for about forty-five minutes. Finally Judge Bean decided it was time to dispose of the pending case, and exclaimed, "Ain't nobody here

seen this hombre steal no horse. The prisoner is hereby discharged, and, by gobs that's my rulin'."

Soon after Culbertson was elected governor of Texas on a reform ticket, he got the legislature to outlaw prize fights in Texas. Neighboring states had done the same thing. Corbett and Fitzsimmons had had a fight planned but of course couldn't have it. Maher and O'Donnel met secretly in Nevada and Maher won. This made him cocky so he offered to take on Fitzsimmons. The latter's manager, Stuart, had lost heavily when he couldn't have the Corbett-Fitzsimmons fight, so he was anxious to recover part of his losses. He thought he could have his fight near El Paso, which was almost outside the realm of law and order; but about the time they were ready for it, three companies of Texas Rangers "blew in" to see that it wasn't put on there. Soldiers were massed in Juarez too, so Stuart was a worried man. Roy Bean had been watching events, so he wired Stuart saying

that he could have the fight in Langtry for "by gobs, he was the Law West of the Pecos and he would guarantee protection." He promptly sent a wire to San Antonio for a carload of beer. He rounded up the citizenry to put a gala dress on the town. Bean, with great secrecy, if you can have secrecy where you can stand on a hill and see what the whole town is doing;—had railroad ties, lumber and empty beer kegs carried to the river. With these things he built a pontoon bridge across the Rio Grande, and then built a fight ring on the other side. He used the natural lay of the land for his ringside seats which he sold for twenty dollars each. He stretched a wagon sheet to keep the folks on this side from seeing the fight without benefit of a ticket, but the sheet wasn't high enough or else the bluffs were too high, for they saw it anyway.

The train arrived early in the morning but according to Bean's plan the fight did not come off until late

in the afternoon, so he disposed of most of the car-load of beer at a dollar a bottle instead the usual fifty cents. The fight was hardly worth seeing for Maher was knocked out in less than two minutes; but Bean once again had proved that he was the LAW WEST OF THE PECOS.

Maybe you have heard these tales before, so lest we bore you with too many of them, we would like to tell you a little about some of these old landmarks after Bean's death, which occurred in 1903.

Then the judge's oldest son, Sam Bean, was in charge of the property which consisted of the Jersey Lily, the Opera House, and several small buildings back of the Opera House. He sold the property to W. I. Babb, and the Bean family left Langtry. Babb, a rancher, had been renting a house in Langtry for several years so that his wife could stay there to send the children to school. Langtry was made up of women who were schooling their own children, or women

whose husbands worked on ranches. Bean had quite a reputation for seeing that these women had wood and other necessities of life.

Babb hired bartenders to run the place until the beer license Bean had held expired. After that, Mrs. Babb, who hated drink more than she feared a rattlesnake on a dark night, would not let him renew the license because Mr. Babb had always imbibed too freely and too frequently; and that was the reason he had come to this country. He used the saloon as a storage place for feed which he bought in car-load lots. Mrs. Babb wanted to tear the building down and use the lumber for some practical purpose, but he was a visionary who realized that it was a landmark which would some day bring people to this country. For even then Bean's reputation as the LAW WEST OF THE PECOS was well known.

Anyway, the family always talked of making a museum of the place but did nothing about it until

1923 when J. L. Merrit came to Langtry with a desire to put in a store. W. H. Dodd owned the only store in Langtry because Torres had moved away. He also owned most of the other available property and of course did not want to sell to a competitor, although the railroad rock crusher had made a boomtown of Langtry. Mr. Babb decide to sell the Opera House and some of the land back of it to Merrit; but in selling that, he found that he did not have a clear title to the Jersey Lily because it was built on railroad property.

Mr. Babb died in 1934 and in a short time Mrs. Babb deeded the building to the state to use as a memorial to the coming of law and order to the west. Much of the furniture and equipment used by Bean is still owned and prized by members of the Babb family. In 1939 the state restored the building, landscaped the grounds, and constructed a loop road from the highway at a total cost of \$14,300.00.

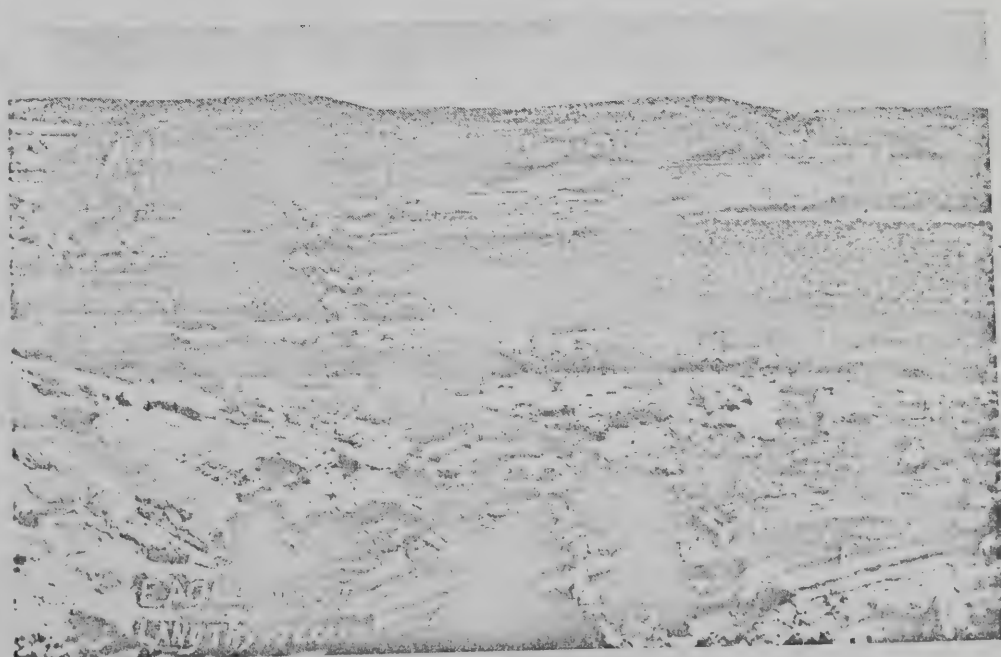
So much for that. The old Judge has been gone

these many years, but Langtry is still here with much to attract people besides the Jersey Lily.

First, there is Torres Springs or Pump Canyon with its hundred ninety-six steps which you have to descend if you would see the real beauty of the place. From it the railroad pumps water for its trains and town. Pump Canyon is the first canyon you see as you go west from Langtry.

Then there is Eagle Nest or Mile Canyon which has many attractions. It has a spring, a large Indian shelter, and many fossils of marine life and pre-historic animals. Near it are the Twin Caves which serve as a benchmark for surveyors.

Now if you have time to go a little farther there are several caves that you might explore. One is in the first cut in the highway west of here. It is rather large and has many stalactites. To the right of the bridge west of Langtry there is another one in which the children of the town have always played. It has



been explored for about a mile. Northeast of town there are several nice caves that have not been explored too much.

Oh! you, too, wonder what people do for a living here? I guess it is difficult to see what an animal could find to eat in this country of ceniza and rocks, but—believe it or not—this is the best sheep raising county of Texas. It produces 7,000,000 pounds of wool a year and 400,000 lambs a year. No, there is not much grass, but sheep do not need long grass and goats eat brush almost exclusively. So don't be like the two tourists who were through here recently. Here is an account of their experience:

"What in the world do you suppose those sheep out there are eating?"

"I couldn't say for we have been driving for miles without seeing so much as a blade of grass."

"If you'll stop the car where that flock is eating, I'll go over and see."

He got out of the car and walked over toward the sheep. When one sheep saw him, it ran away, and these being sheep, the others all naturally followed, so the inquisitive gentleman returned to the car where he was asked,

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"Did you find out what they were eating?"

"No I didn't, as they ate it all up before I got there."

Now if you think it is the life of Riley to live out here—you just try it. Every twig has stickers, you stumble over rocks or pick up a dog cactus every time you step out of the house. Of course you know about thorns and stones, but do you know about dog cactus? It is a little ball of green that is completely covered with long spines, or thorns. It seems to leap at you when you get near it.

Those were not rivers that you saw back there, they were canyons. They are dry all right. That is why we have windmills. There is nothing like letting Old Mother Nature do your work for you. Mr. Rancher

drills a well, puts a windmill on it, builds a tank for storage and pipelines to his various pastures, and then settles back to take his ease. BUT, Old Mother Nature is a capricious soul. She sees that Mr. Rancher is taking life a bit too easy, so she puts a pebble under the bottom valve in the well so no water is lifted out; or she stops the wind. No, she won't let him get too lazy.

We natives use the wind for lights too. Though it is more expensive than hydroelectric power, it is just as good. Of course it took some time to figure that one out, but the inventor of the windcharger is about as popular in West Texas as Levi Garret is in East Texas.

Cattle guards are, of course, sort of misnamed in this country, for they are mostly sheep and goat guards, to keep the animals in a pasture, while the rancher can leave it without having to open and shut a gate.—The O.P.A. did not exactly understand the

meaning of a cattle guard either, for when one west Texas rancher reported that he had a hundred cattle guards on his ranch, he was asked to cut down on the personnel of cattle guards.

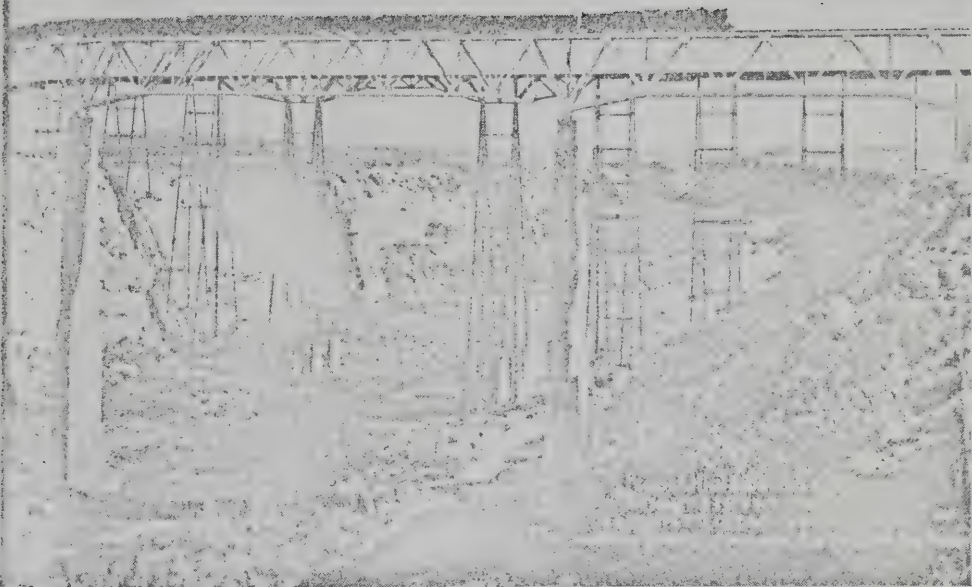
Minerals? Where there as so many rocks it does seem that there would be oil or some kind of a mine; but although several tests have been made, so far no paying well has been brought in. However a few years ago a carload of bayrite was shipped from here, and during World War I a trainload of manganese was shipped from Shumla. This little mine is located a few feet from the highway.

What do Langtrites do for pleasure? Have you ever taken a skillet, an old tin bucket for coffee, some potatoes, bacon—when you can get it—a twenty-two rifle, and gone to the river and dug in an old Indian cave? Or, hunted cactus, or shot at the bluff? If you have, then you will know what we mean when we say, you can enjoy LIFE IN LANGTRY. If you haven't done these things

Ever been to a West Texas dance? Then brother, you have never danced! We West Texans play like we work—whole heartedly. We start dancing around dark and never stop until long after sun-up. We probably wouldn't stop then if we could ever find musicians to last as long as we can. Of course, it takes several weeks to recuperate. For that reason we have only two or three dances a year.

We are not sure that Langtry should consider the Pecos river as one of its scenic attractions, yet many of the workmen on the new Pecos high bridge lived in Langtry while the new bridge was being constructed. This bridge was completed in December 1944, and is about two hundred yards below the old one. Due to the war it has not been advertised as extensively as the old one, but it is a beautiful bridge.

The old bridge was left standing because it was too expensive to tear down. It has a history in keeping with the conditions under which it was built by a



bunch of gun-totin' roughnecks. It has been the scene of many dramatic and romantic incidents since its completion in 1896, as the fourth highest bridge in the United States.

Can you imagine wanting to be married on a bridge with three hundred-twenty feet of nothingness under you? A young lady did,—and so she was. She was married by W. H. Dodd, the successor to Roy Bean as Justice of the Peace.

Or can you imagine riding across a place that high on a horse to test the bravery of a lover? This actually occurred. A local Miss wanted to test her lover, and so she did. She found he wasn't brave enough to do that, so she wouldn't marry him.

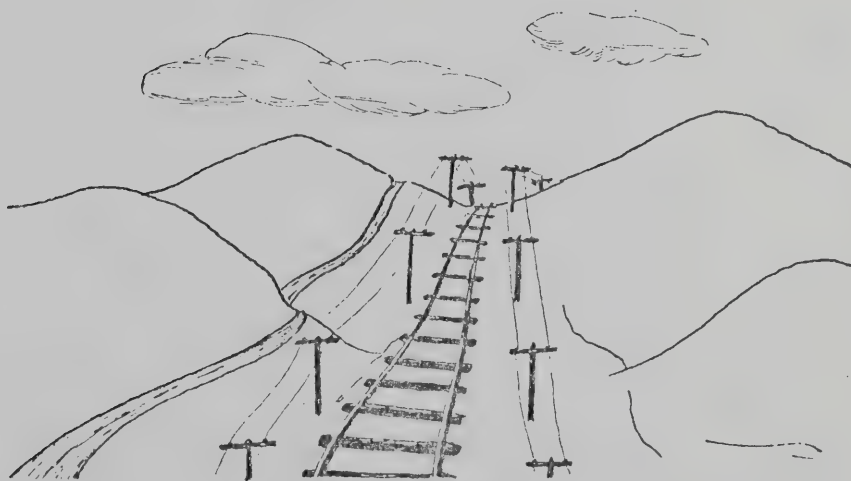
Another lady chose it as a place to end it all when the man she loved did not return her love. She took off her shoes, put a very sentimental message in one of them, and jumped over the side before her companion knew what she was about. Again Mr. Dodd

was called, but there was nothing for him to do this time except pronounce her dead.

If you had been a member of the camel caravan which came through here in 1857, you would have had to go several miles north of here to cross the Pecos. But, thanks to Lieutenant Bullis, of the United States Cavalry, we have a crossing about two hundred yards above where the Pecos flows into the Rio Grande. Lieutenant Bullis discovered that the Apaches had a crossing at this place. He requisitioned four hundred kegs of black powder and some digging tools from the government. With these supplies and the labor of his Seminole Negro Scouts, he blasted a road down the east side of the Pecos. It was no trouble to ford the river there, nor to find a way out of a canyon a mile or two up the river. Since that time there has always been a crossing at the mouth of the Pecos.

About 1920 the state built a bridge across the Pecos at this place and named it for Lieutenant Bullis. Since that time the road has not been so dangerous, but more people have met their MAKER on it, for cars have taken the place of burros. Pongas Cuidado!

Now that we have you back east of the Pecos and in the realm of law and order, we bid you a fond "Adios."



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